DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 452 785 HE 034 005

AUTHOR Pinheiro, Sandro O.
TITLE Perceptions versus Preferences: Adult International Students' Teaching-Learning Experiences in an American University.
PUB DATE 2001-00-00
NOTE 17p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cognitive Style; Foreign Students; *Graduate Students; Higher Education; *Learning; *Student Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS Preference Patterns

ABSTRACT

International students' perceptions of and preferences for the teaching-learning process in a U.S. university was assessed. Nine participants representing three regions of the world (Asia, Africa, and Latin America) were interviewed individually and asked to reflect on their teaching-learning experiences in Ph.D. courses. They were also asked to describe their preferred conditions of learning. The model of andragogy of Knowles (1980) was used to develop both the interview protocol for the study and a theoretical framework to understand the perceived experiences and preferred learning conditions. Three major domains were identified by students: (1) the role of participation; (2) the learner's prior experiences; and (3) the teacher's role. Students perceived their experiences to be both positive and negative. Positive and preferred experiences were characterized by the themes of engagement and connectedness, while negative experiences were characterized by disengagement and disconnectedness. The positive and preferred experiences of these international students were congruent with the andragogical model, but the negative experiences were not. The study provides insights into the needs of international students and ways to improve the quality of education for the multicultural population. (Contains 15 references.) (SLD)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 452 785

Perceptions Versus Preferences: Adult International Students' Teaching-Learning Experiences in an American University

Sandro O. Pinheiro, Ph.D.
Michigan State University, 325 West Fee Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824
Pinheiro@msu.edu

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
S. Pinheiro
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

HE 034 005

Perceptions Versus Preferences: Adult International Students' Teaching-Learning Experiences in an American University

Sandro O. Pinheiro, Ph.D.
Michigan State University, 325 West Fee Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824
Pinheiro@msu.edu

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess international students' perceptions of and preferences for the teaching-learning process in an American university. Participants representing three regions of the world: Asia, Africa and Latin America were interviewed individually and asked to reflect on their teaching-learning experiences in Ph.D. courses. They were also asked to describe what their preferred conditions of learning were. Knowles' (1980) model of andragogy was used to develop both the interview protocol for the study and a theoretical framework to understand the perceived experiences and preferred conditions of learning of these adult learners. Three domains were identified as major areas addressed by the students as they spoke about their experiences: role of participation; role of learner's prior experiences; and role of the teacher. Students perceived their experiences to be both positive and negative. Positive and preferred experiences were characterized by the themes of engagement and connectedness, while negative experiences were characterized by disengagement and disconnectedness. International students' positive and preferred experiences with the teaching-learning process were congruent with the andragogical model; the negative experiences were not. The study provides insights on how to address the needs of international students and how to improve the quality of education for this multicultural population.

Introduction

International students' academic needs as learners may have been overlooked by American universities. This has become cause for dissatisfaction and has impacted the academic experience of many international students. Some universities have recognized or have been advised about their lack of purposeful participation in the education of international students and are now working to improve their efforts to better serve the needs of this multicultural population.

American universities have for many decades opened their doors to receive international students on their campuses. In the school year of 1990/91, the Institute of International Education (IIE) indicated in its "Open Doors 1990/91" annual report (Zikopoulos, 1991) that the number of international students at U.S. colleges and universities had reached an all-time high of 407,529. International students accounted in that year for over 20 percent of all graduate enrollment in the United States (Wan, Chapman, and Biggs, 1992). The total number of international students in higher education has now increased to 517,723 of which 225,383 are graduate students (Open Doors 99-00, www.opendoorsweb.org).

The presence of international students on American campuses is a financial investment as well as evidence of an effort by universities to internationalize their curriculum, the faculty, and the student body. American universities have acknowledged the importance of giving their American students an education with a global perspective so that they will be prepared to be citizens of the world and will be marketable in the international job market.

HE034005

Please Note: This paper is in draft form. I would appreciate your comments. Please do not copy or quote without the author's permission.

Wan, Chapman, and Biggs (1992) state that "for the most part, international students are eagerly courted by American institutions
because they offer an important diversity of viewpoint to the student body, help offset a declining American applicant pool, and often come with full funding" (p. 607). Goodwin and Nacht (1983), exploring with faculty and administrators the importance of international students on campus, were told that "interaction with other cultures can change the nature of a student's relations with other people and that Americans must fight their natural geographic and political isolation by the device such as foreign students on their campuses" (p. 1).

By opening their doors to international students, American universities are profiting but are also committing themselves to provide a high quality education for this multicultural population. The question, however, is: How are American universities providing for the educational needs of international students?

Research has shown that American universities have not given enough attention to the needs of international students (Fasheh, 1984). Stephen C. Dunnett, of the National Association for Foreign Student Affairs says that "Not only have U.S. institutions of higher education been indifferent to the adjustment problems of international students, they have also given little attention to such problems as the relevancy of American educational programs for the developing world" (Lee, 1981, p. xi). Goodwin and Nacht (1983) found in their study that several institutions saw themselves inadequately prepared to receive international students: "For them the United States' acceptance of these foreign students was like inviting guests to your home when you have no guestroom" (p. 2).

It is evident that American universities have a difficult task in trying to accommodate the needs of international students. These students come from diverse cultural, social, political, and educational backgrounds. However, if universities are willing to open their doors for these students and receive benefits from this, they have an ethical responsibility to provide for these students' needs. As Allemeh (1989) states, "This hosting relationship demands responsible services" (p. 15).

In order to respond to the academic needs of this multicultural population, American universities need to critically assess the academic experiences of international students on their campuses so that they can understand the challenges, successes, and failures these adult students face during their academic journey in the U.S. This assessment, however, needs to be done from the perspective of the international students.

There has been a fair amount of research on the problems and needs of international students in American colleges and universities campus (Moore, 1965; Lee, 1981; DuBois, 1959; Spaulding & Flack, 1976). Though a fair amount of literature has been written on the topic of international students, an in-depth study of the nature of these students' academic experiences, from their point of view, has yet to be explored. In particular, research is needed on international students' perceptions of the teaching-learning process they encounter in American universities (Konyu-Fogel, 1993; Dunnett, 1977). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the academic experiences of a selected group of graduate international students in an American university, particularly their experiences with the teaching-learning process. My hope was that, through this study, new knowledge about the nature of international students' academic experiences and their

preferred conditions of learning would emerge, and with this knowledge, American universities would be able to better respond to the academic needs of international students and consequently demonstrate their commitment to provide quality education for this multicultural population.

Conceptual Perspectives

In order to understand the academic (teaching-learning) experiences of adult international students in an American university, I chose to look at these experiences through the lens of adult learning theory, particularly the andragogical model developed by Knowles (1980).
In the andragogical model, Knowles (1980) asserts that in the teaching-learning transaction, the learning climate needs to be characterized by physical comfort, mutual trust and respect, cooperation, freedom of expression, and acceptance of diverse point of views. He states that creating a conducive climate for learning is an essential concept to take into consideration when planning and implementing learning activities for adults. The teacher has the responsibility to set the tone for the learning environment. He/she needs to provide a stage in the classroom where learners feel free to dialogue and create knowledge. This happens by the teacher setting a psychological climate where adults are respected and their experiences are valued, they cooperate in the learning journey instead of competing, and they can express their feelings and ideas without feeling intimidated and rejected. Knowles (1980) emphasizes that the learner should not be just a passive receiver of directions or information but that he/she should have an active role in the whole teaching-learning transaction. He/she should be involved in the planning and implementation as well as the evaluation of their own progress. Learners should be actively involved with the teacher in assessing their own needs as well as in creating objectives for their learning. They should also be able to plan with the teacher what they would like to learn as well as how they would like to learn it. The learning activities should be developed in a way that the learners take an active role in the learning process, and the evaluation process should allow for the learners to assess their own progress toward their goals. For these things to happen, it is essential that the teacher creates an organizational structure and makes use of instructional approaches that encourage such active participation on the part of the learner.

Taking into consideration the assumptions and practical implications of andragogy, this research focused on the following aspects of the teaching-learning process: 1) learning climate; 2) the roles of the teacher and the learner; 3) teacher-learner interactions; 4) instructional approaches used by the teacher; 5) the planning of the learning activity; 6) the relevancy of the content chosen for the learning activities as related to learners' educational goals; 7) the role of learner's experience in the teaching-learning process; and 8) evaluation.

Methods

The Setting and Participants

Nine education Ph.D. international students were purposefully selected (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993) to participate in the study. They represented three regions of the world: Asia, Africa and Latin America. They were adult students who had held professional jobs and who were planning to return to their home country after completion of their Ph.D. studies. They all had professional backgrounds in the field of education. Table 1 provides an overview of the background

information on the participants. The setting of the study was the College of Education at Midwest University (pseudonym). All participants were pursuing a Ph.D. in the Department of Teacher Education and were at least in the second year of their Ph.D. program. Recruitment for the study was done via three e-mail messages to a listserv for international students in the college, and via personal phone calls to international students who were recommended by other participants. Nine international students (three from Asia, three from Africa, and three from Latin America) were selected and agreed to participate in the study.

Table 1
Background Information on Participants

Participants	Region	Sex	Year in Ph.D.	Professional Background
Student 1	Africa	Female	4th	Professor
Student 2	Africa	Male	3rd	Teacher
Student 3	Africa	Male	2nd	Education Coordinator NGO
Student 4	Asia	Female	2nd	Teacher
Student 5	Asia	Female	4th	Assistant Professor
Student 6	Asia	Male	2nd	Department of Education
Student 7	Latin America	Female	4th	Professor
Student 8	Latin America	Female	4th	Education District Supervisor
Student 9	Latin America	Male	2nd	Professor

Research Questions

The study addressed five major questions: (1) How do international students perceive their teaching-learning experiences in an American university? (2) What would international students ideally prefer their teaching-learning experiences to be like? (3) What are the differences between international students' perceived experiences and their preferred conditions of learning? (4) To what extent do international students' perceived experiences reflect what Knowles (1980) advocates as effective adult learning principles? (5) To what extent do international students' preferred experiences reflect what Knowles advocates as effective adult learning principles?

Data Collection

A semi-structured interview protocol was used to guide students' reflections about their teaching-learning experiences and preferred conditions of learning. Participants were interviewed individually and were asked to reflect on their teaching-learning experiences in an introductory and advanced Ph.D. course. They were also asked to describe what their preferred conditions of learning were. Though the protocol served as a guide to the interviews, I often followed the questions with probing remarks which allowed me to get more in-depth information on the

experiences the students were sharing. I also encouraged participants to tell their stories about their academic experiences.

Knowles' (1980) model of andragogy was used to develop both the interview protocol for the study and a theoretical framework to understand the perceived experiences and preferred conditions of learning of these adult learners in an American university. The interview focused on eight aspects of the teaching-learning process: (1) the learning climate; (2) the role of the teacher and the learner; (3) teacher and learner interactions; (4) the instructional approaches; (5) the decision making process; (6) the relevancy of content to students educational goals; (7) the role of learner's experiences; and (8) evaluation.

Two individual, one and a half hour interviews were conducted with each participant to make sure that sufficient and relevant data were collected. All interviews (18) were tape recorded (with the consent of the participants) and transcribed. After the transcriptions were done, I listened to the 18 tapes individually to make corrections on transcripts in which I found errors. These procedures are some of the steps I took to establish credibility to the data.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the 18 taped interviews were transcribed into Word documents and later imported into a data analysis software program called QSR NUD*IST. Reports from the transcribed interviews were printed and each interview was read in its entirety. I first read all the interviews regarding the introductory course, and then the advanced course. A short memo was written for each interview. As I read the data, I began to make annotations about what the students said about their perceived and preferred experiences with the teaching-learning process. I also began to highlight significant statements students were making and to designate an initial code for them. As I went through this process, I soon began to realize that the students' perceptions of the teaching-learning process could be labeled as positive, negative, or preferred. So it became apparent that it would be of value to start coding students' statements under these headings. For instance, I coded statements about the "learning climate" under positive learning climate, negative learning climate, and preferred learning climate. I repeated the same task for the other eight elements of the teaching-learning transaction. Using NUD*IST, I was able to code the data electronically by creating nodes (spaces/files where one can place coded text/data) and filing significant statements (text) and memos under these nodes. The initial nodes were created based on the study's conceptual framework (that is, the eight aspects of the teaching-learning transaction) and the headings described above which emerged from the first round of data analysis. Other "free nodes," or free categories, were created both as I read the data for the first time and after I began to read the reports on the positive, negative and preferred nodes. Thus the free nodes were the products of two rounds of data analysis. These nodes were unique ideas and categories emerging from the data which I anticipated becoming important as I tried to describe the participants' teaching-learning experiences. Examples of free nodes are: reading assignment, background-guidance, culture differences, grades, silent teacher, constructivism, participation, role of learner's prior experiences, quality of discussion, etc.

Once all the above steps had been taken, further analysis was conducted with the data. This resulted in identifying the three domains (role of participation, role of learners' prior experiences, and role of the teacher) that are the basis for this study's findings.

Results

How do international students perceive their teaching-learning experiences?

Three major categories emerged as the overarching domains related to these students' teaching-learning experiences in an American university classroom. They are the following: role of participation (engaging and disengaging participation); role of learner's prior experiences (connected and disconnected experiences and backgrounds); and role of the teacher (teacher as co-learner and the silent teacher). Students perceived their experiences with the teaching-learning process to be both positive and negative. Positive and preferred experiences were characterized by the themes of *engagement* and *connectedness*, while negative experiences were characterized by *disengagement* and *disconnectedness*. Table 2 diagrams the domains and themes identified in the study.

Table 2
Domains and Themes of International Students' Teaching-Learning Experiences

Domains	Positive/Preferred Experiences Themes	Negative Experiences Themes
Role of Participation	Engaging Participation	Disengaging Participation
Role of Learner's Prior Experiences	Connected Experiences and Backgrounds	Disconnected Experiences and Backgrounds
Role of the Teacher	Co-Learner	Silent Teacher

Role of Participation

The nature of classroom participation played an important role in how international students perceived their teaching-learning experiences. Participation was viewed here not only as the interactions that went on in the classroom but also as the classroom life (Jackson, 1968) or aspects of the classroom behavior (Karp and Yoels, 1976). It included norms of discussion, the nature of interaction among teacher and learners, the course and classroom structure, the creation and maintenance of the learning environment, the decision-making process, and an element of the grade. Positive participation was described as experiences where learners and teachers were actively engaged as co-learners and co-decision makers in the teaching-learning process. In situations of positive participation, the readings and the discussions in the classroom were relevant to the needs and interests of the learners and took into consideration the learners' previous knowledge and professional experiences. Teachers provided frameworks and/or provided some structure for the discussions in the classroom. Students were encouraged to bring in their previous experiences both during discussion in the classroom and in their writings. Finally, teachers and learners constructed knowledge together.

Negative experiences with participation were described as situations where international students were disengaged from the classroom discourse apparently because their experiences and their background were ignored and disconnected from the teaching-learning process. Discussions focused on readings which were many times irrelevant to these learners' educational goals, their

previous experiences, and their future endeavors in education in their own countries. In situations of negative participation, teachers were silent and did not engage in the discussion process in the classroom, there were few to no negotiations on the content to be learned and requirements to be fulfilled, and finally, participation was perceived by the students to be merely a matter of students reading articles and saying disconnected things in class.

Role of Learner's Prior Experiences

The role learners' prior experiences played in the teaching-learning process had a great influence on how students perceived their academic experience. Students perceived their experience to be positive when their personal and professional experiences were connected to the teaching-learning process. That is, the readings, the writing requirements and the discussions in the classroom took into consideration the learners' knowledge and their previous professional experiences. When these conditions were present in the teaching-learning process, students also felt like they were being treated as professionals, as adults, as someone who had something to offer to others.

On the other hand, their negative experiences were described as situations where their experiences and their background were ignored and disconnected from the teaching-learning process. Discussions in these classrooms focused on the readings and the teachers' agenda which were many times irrelevant or unconnected to these learners' educational goals, previous experiences, and future endeavors in education on their countries. The writing assignments were centered on specific subjects rather than on the students' interests and experiences. Finally, students felt under these situations that their history had been rejected, that they were not being treated as adults and professionals, and that their experiences were not valued.

The Role of the Teacher

The roles teachers played in the classroom had a great influence on how students perceived their teaching-learning experience. Students perceived their experience to be positive when they had a teacher who was engaged, connected, and active in the learning environment. On the other hand, their negative experiences were described as situations where the teacher was disengaged, inactive, and silent.

Students had strong views about what worked and what didn't work as far as the roles teachers played in the classroom and in their educational program. They described the teacher as *co-learner* or *co-participant* when he/she was engaged and active in the classroom learning community, and as *silent teacher* when he/she was disengaged and inactive in the teaching-learning process. Under these two major categories students also referred to teachers as: 1) "bureaucrat" (the teacher is in the classroom just to assess who talks and who doesn't, and to read students' papers and at the end give them a grade – this was a characteristic of the silent teacher); 2) "moderator" (one who directs and keep the class discussion focused -this was seen as a positive characteristic of the teacher because sometimes the classroom discussions were all over the place); and 3) "facilitator" (one who initiates and maintains the discussion by asking students to "say more" - this term was used in a negative way because it was used to characterize the silent teacher, who comes to class and just initiates the discussion and keeps probing the

learners to "say more" without giving any input. However, some students also spoke of the concept of facilitator in a positive manner).

Teacher as Co-Learner

As students talked about positive experiences with the teaching-learning process, they made reference to the role of the teacher as an active and engaged member of the learning community. Mostly all students described one or more positive experiences they had with teachers in the program. Even those that encountered difficulty and overall dissatisfaction with the role of the teacher shared a number of positive experiences. In some situations they talked about the positive role of the teacher by comparing it with those which they perceived to not be as effective. In effect they saw these teachers as *co-learners*.

Students spoke of positive experiences with the teaching-learning process when they had teachers who were engaged and were participants in the learning community. These teachers not only facilitated discussion but they shared their experiences and expert knowledge with the students so that they could benefit from it and thus together be able to construct new knowledge as a learning community. They shared their point of view on the readings, they brought closure and summary to discussions, they were sensitive to the learners' needs. They also motivated students to share and include their experiences, both in the classroom discussions and in their writings; they provided constructive feedback to students both in the classroom discussions and on their writings; and finally they admitted to being co-learners with the students.

The Silent Teacher

When students spoke about their negative perceptions of the role of the teacher in the classroom, several (5) referred to the teacher as one who listens and does not talk – *the silent teacher*. They saw the silent teacher as one who does not teach, does not share his/her expertise and knowledge, does not contribute to the discussion in the classroom, one who just asks questions and probes. For some students this behavior was unusual and different from their previous experiences as teachers and as learners. These students came from educational traditions where the teacher talks and leads the learners. It is clear from these students' accounts that they expected the teachers to have a more active teaching role. Students were not necessarily against the teacher's role as a facilitator or moderator of discussions, but they were unhappy and at times frustrated with the teacher's silence and lack of contribution and participation in the learning process.

What would international students ideally prefer their teaching-learning experiences to be like?

International students were very vocal in expressing what their ideal teaching-learning experiences would look like. On several occasions these ideal conditions of learning were present in what they had experienced in some of their courses. Thus, when they spoke of preferred ways of learning, they restated aspects of what they had described as positive experiences. They also discussed their preferred teaching-learning experiences by contrasting those to the negative experiences they have gone through in other courses. They did that by describing what could have been done differently to improve those negative experiences.

Role of Participation

International students' views on what would be an ideal teaching-learning process in their courses focused on several aspects. As far as the role of participation is concern, students emphasized the importance of teachers assessing learners' needs, backgrounds and professional experiences so that they could develop classroom discussions as well as course requirements (reading assignments and papers) which would help learners to achieve their educational goals. Another aspect addressed by some of the students was the importance of organizing the participation process. Some of the suggestions were for teachers to provide universal categories and frameworks for the discussion process; to provide opportunities for learners to get to know each other and to work in groups in class so that first, they would not feel like strangers and secondly, that they would be able to collaboratively help each other to learn more in depth the material before them; to provide the structure in which the learners could collaboratively develop the agenda for the course and thus have their voice/interest/needs heard; to minimize the amount of reading so that students could address issues in depth instead of superficially; and to have the teacher explain the background and elaborate on the problem or content to be discussed, and to have teachers provide opportunities or encourage learners to share their work with each other.

Role of Learners' Prior Experiences

As far as the role of learners' prior experiences in the teaching-learning process, students first of all emphasized that teachers need to practice the old principle about taking into consideration the students' previous background and experiences. They need to assess learners' needs and interests and include them in the teaching-learning process. Students pointed out that teachers should respect their professional history and treat them not as empty slates but as adults who bring professional, educational and personal experiences and knowledge to the learning environment.

Role of the Teacher

Finally, as far as the role of the teacher is concerned, students prefer a teacher who is engaged in the teaching-learning process; a teacher who talks and shares his/her expertise/knowledge with the learning community; a teacher who elaborates on issues and provides theoretical tools for classroom discussions; a teacher who brings closure to classroom discussion; a teacher who treats his/her students as adults and professionals; a teacher who provides critical feedback which leads learners to further understanding of the content that is before them; a teacher who finds the potential in his/her learners and guides them to use it for their personal and professional growth, and finally, a teacher who is not silent.

What are the differences between international students' perceived experiences and their preferred conditions of learning?

There were both similarities and differences between international students' perceptions and preferences with the teaching-learning process. Students' perceived experiences were characterized by both positive and negative aspects. The negative aspects were different from

what students reported to be their preferred conditions of learning. But their positive experiences were many times stated as being their preferred conditions of learning.

Students' positive and preferred experiences with the teaching-learning process were characterized by such themes as connectedness and engagement. Students reported perceiving their experiences as positive when, for instance, their teachers were connected or engaged in the teaching-learning process, or when participation was engaging, relevant, and connected to the students' needs and interests, and finally when their prior experiences were used as resources for their individual learning and the learning of others. Therefore, what students reported as positive and effective in their teaching-learning experiences was also what they considered to be their preferred conditions of learning.

The differences between the negative experiences and the students' preferred conditions of learning were more sharply distinct. First, it was the overall belief of the majority of the students that teachers should exert a more active leadership/expert role in the classroom. They should create structure for their courses and in that structure provide the opportunity for learners to collaboratively redesign the course syllabus with the teacher, taking into consideration the students' needs and interests. Teachers should voice their opinion in the classroom. They should elaborate (give a brief lecture) on the topics to be discussed, be explicit about their views on different issues addressed by the group, and also attempt to bring closure or provide a summary to long classroom discussions. Students expected that teachers would actually teach, rather than only come to class to listen to students talking. They were not advocating that teachers should always lecture to students but they were hoping to have the teachers share their knowledge, experiences, and expertise with the learning community as well. Last, students expected and in some situations experienced the teachers to be co-learners in the teaching-learning process. These expectations, though fulfilled in some courses, were not a classroom reality for the majority of these international students. Students reported that several of their teachers assumed a silent role in the classroom which led students to have frustrating experiences with the teaching-learning process.

Secondly, students expected that the participation process both in the planning and implementation of the teaching-learning process would be more adult/learner-centered. Students expected to be given more freedom in participating in the planning of the course content and the course requirements. They would have liked to be allowed to select reading assignments that were relevant to their educational goals and background. They would have also liked to be given a choice to focus their reading, writing and classroom discussion on issues and problems that were real to their home country context, and they would have preferred to have classroom discussions where both teacher and learners would contribute to the learning community and where collaborative construction of knowledge would be a reality.

These were expectations that were not met in many of the classrooms. Students reported that in several of their courses they had no freedom to negotiate the syllabus that was given to them by the teacher. The content, the requirements, and the evaluation process were all dictated by the teacher. Students had very little to say about what classroom and course structure should look like. The discussions in the classroom were perceived as disperse and disconnected, and many times about issues that international students found to be irrelevant to their needs, interests, and educational goals. Students also found that the dynamic of participation was competitive and

that there was very little effort on the part of teacher and learners to construct knowledge together.

Finally, international students expected the teaching-learning process to be much more inclusive of their history, prior experiences, and background. This, however, was not always the case in several of their courses. International students hoped that their prior experiences, history, and background would have been acknowledged and valued by their teachers. For them, acknowledging their experiences meant that the teachers would treat them as adult professionals who had something to offer to the learning community. Also, the teachers would not ignore the students' experiences and knowledge, treating them as if they knew nothing.

As far as valuing international students' experiences, students hoped that teachers would have provided opportunities for them to share their home experiences with their classmates and would have encouraged and given them the freedom to bring in these experiences to shed light on the educational issues addressed in the classroom and on writing requirements.

Students also expressed that teachers could show that they valued international students by being more global in their approach to the content selection for their courses. Students would like to see teachers reading as well as assigning readings that are more international in nature. That would help teachers to be more aware of what is happening in education around the world and to make their courses more inclusive of international students' experiences and background.

In conclusion, international students' perceived teaching-learning experiences and preferred conditions of learning had both similarities and differences. Students' preferred conditions of learning were similar to what they perceived as positive teaching-learning experiences. However negative teaching-learning experiences were very different from what students reported being their preferred condition of learning.

To what extent do international students' perceived experiences reflect what Knowles advocates as effective adult learning principles?

International students had some experiences with courses which reflected the andragogical model, and others that did not. Courses which were perceived to be positive and effective were characterized by the principles embedded in andragogy. They were described as having an informal and interactive learning climate. Teachers had an active leadership role in the classroom. Learners were actively engaged in the discussions in the classroom, as they discussed issues that were relevant to their professional experiences and educational goals, and they were given the opportunity to make decisions on what to read and what to write about in their papers. Teacher-learners' interaction in these courses, was characterized by trust, collegiality and respect. Instructional approaches were balanced between group discussions, and teachers' elaboration and dissemination of content. Learners' prior experiences were welcome, valued, encouraged to be shared in the classroom, and written about in the students' writing assignments.

Courses which were perceived to be negative or non-effective by the international students were not reflective of the andragogical model. From the point of view of the participants, these courses were usually characterized by curriculum structures and behaviors on the part of teachers and learners which were not congruent with what is advocated as effective adult learning

principles. They were characterized by aspects such as a rigid curriculum structure, where learners were told what to read, write, and learn; an environment where learners were not treated as adults or professionals because their history, background, and experiences were ignored and excluded from the teaching-learning process; teachers who did not teach and were not engaged in the classroom discourse; learners who did not feel like they were part of the learning community; and finally, classrooms where there was a lack of collaboration among teachers and learners.

To what extent do international students' preferred experiences reflect what Knowles advocates as effective adult learning principles?

International students' preferred conditions of learning were reflective of what is advocated in the andragogical model as effective adult learning principles.

Students expected a learning climate where learners and teacher would respect each other's history and would collaborate in the process of mutual inquiry. They expected the teacher to speak in class. They believe that teachers should be actively engaged with the learning community. Learners should collaborate in the classroom instead of competing with each other. . They should try to contribute to the learning community by sharing their experiences and ideas, and by attempting to construct knowledge collaboratively with the teacher and other learners.

Students prefer instructional approaches which emphasize small group discussions, as compared to large group discussions. In small groups international students feel more at ease to discuss, ask questions and get to know their classmates. They also prefer teaching-learning sessions where the teacher spends a part of the session lecturing. That is, they prefer classes where teachers elaborate on the issues/problems/topics at hand, providing introduction, background and their own views on these issues, as well as providing a summary or conclusion for the discussions.

To students, it is very important in the teaching-learning process that learners be given the opportunity to share and reflect on their (learners') prior experiences. They stated that they come to the Ph.D. program not as novice students but rather as professionals and therefore with a lot of experiences in the educational field. These experiences, they believe, should be addressed in the teaching-learning process because these home experiences serve as frameworks for their understanding and exploration of the new content and knowledge they are exposed to in the Ph.D. program. These experiences are also important because they represent the issues and problems these professionals bring into the Ph.D. program for which they hope to develop strategic solutions. International students also believe that if their prior experiences and backgrounds were given consideration in the teaching-learning process, the content, reading, and discussions would be more relevant. By choosing to be inclusive of international students' experiences, needs, and interests, teachers would be motivating these learners to be active participants in the teaching-learning process.

In conclusion, international students preferred conditions of learning, as described above, are congruent with and supported by the andragogical model.

Discussion

The findings of the study do not disconfirm what has already been written in the literature about the adjustment issues, needs, and problems international students face in American universities. These nine international students also reported having difficulties in adapting to the American culture, the American educational system, the English language, etc. However the study adds to the literature in international students' education in American universities by providing new insights concerning aspects of both positive and negative teaching-learning experiences for Ph.D. adult international students. It also provides insights concerning international students' preferred conditions of learning in an education Ph.D. program previously not recorded in the literature.

The study also contributes to adult learning theory as it used andragogy as a framework to understand/critique adult international students' teaching-learning experiences. It also provided empirical evidence to Knowles' (1980) work, which has not been fully empirically examined. That is, what international students reported as being positive teaching-learning experiences and as their preferred conditions of learning support what Knowles advocates as effective adult learning principles.

Although students' positive and preferred experiences were congruent with andragogy, a question emerged about the meaning of learner involvement and the learner-centered approaches to teaching. There appears to be a contradiction in what students expected of the teaching-learning process. While students reported preferring a learner-centered approach to teaching, they also seemed to want to "be told." That is, they expected teachers to "set the structure for learning, talk, teach, and give input" in the classroom discourse. To resolve what seemed to be a conflict of views on the part of the students, I needed to further explore Knowles' (1980) notion of participation in order to understand the real meaning of participation/involvement and a learner-centered environment for adult learners.

Knowles (1980) advocates learner-centered teaching and mutual participation of teachers and learners in the planning and implementation of the teaching-learning process. Students wanted to participate in the design of their courses; however few professors provided that option to learners. Typically, learners received the syllabus for the course and did not have a lot of input into it. Though learners did not have much say on the course design, they were given the opportunity to participate and be involved in the implementation of several of their courses. That is, they were given the opportunity to talk in class. However, the type of involvement and participation which were fostered by some teachers did not seem to respond to students' needs. Though students wanted to be able to participate and share their experiences with their learning community, which appeared to be what teachers were fostering in the classroom, students were also hoping to have teachers share their expertise and be involved in the classroom discourse as co-learners instead of being silent. So what seemed to be a learner-centered approach to teaching was perceived by the international students to be one-way participation; that is, students would talk and the teacher would just listen and not contribute as a member of the learning community. Therefore, for the students, the mere exercise of talking without input from the teacher did not equal meaningful/participatory, learner-centered classroom discourse. Involvement seemed to mean participation of all members of the learning community in the teaching-learning process. Moreover, for the students, learner-centered participatory teaching-learning process was not just a matter of teacher and learners talking but it was what they talked about. Students did not see the teaching-learning process as effective if what they talked about was perceived as irrelevant to their educational goals and the problems they hoped to address in their Ph.D. program. To these

students, meaningful involvement and a learner-centered approach to teaching meant that teachers should provide an environment where teachers and learners constructed the agenda for the course in mutual cooperation. Also a learner-centered approach would mean that both teachers and learners would actively participate in the classroom discourse, sharing their knowledge and experiences, and talking about issues that reflected the needs and interests of all members of the learning community. Thus, what appeared to be a contradiction between learners' expectations and what teachers were providing was perhaps not such a contradiction. That is, this apparent conflict can be understood by examining these students' meanings concerning effective involvement/participation and learner-centered approaches to teaching.

A message that came through very clear in this study was that students wanted to be more actively involved with the planning and implementation of the teaching-learning process. The reality, however, was that they had very few opportunities to participate in the planning of their courses. Involving students in the teaching-learning process is a worthwhile goal but the logistics of making it happening may not be so easy. In order to accomplish this goal, the following questions remain to be answered: How could students' involvement in planning the courses and syllabi actually be implemented? When should students join the planning? What are the incentives for the faculty to involve the students? How will faculty and students deal with philosophical and cultural differences in the planning and implementation process? Other questions concerning students' engagement and connection with the teaching-learning process are: How can teachers include the experiences of all learners in the classroom discourse? What should be the content addressed in a multicultural/international university classroom? How can teachers make the curriculum and content more global in order to include all members of the learning community? Teachers, educational policy makers, department chairs and deans should all be interested in these questions in order to ensure optimal learning experiences for international as well as domestic students.

Recommendations for Further Research

Because of the lack of research about international students' teaching-learning experiences in American universities, more research of this nature needs to be implemented. For instance, a similar study could be implemented with international students from other disciplines. It would be interesting and an important addition to the literature to explore the similarities and differences across disciplines in international students' perceptions and preferences concerning the teaching-learning process. Possibly, various disciplines have different approaches to the teaching-learning process, and international students in other disciplines may be having experiences which differ from those reported by the participants.

Further study also could explore the perceptions and preferences of domestic students with the teaching-learning process. This would help answer whether the perceptions and preferences reported in this study are particular to international students or if they are true to a broader audience of adult learners in a College of Education. Finally, yet another study could include the perspectives of the teachers. The research design could look at international students' perceptions of the teaching-learning process as compared with the teachers' description of their teaching philosophy and enactment of it. From this study, it is not clear whether international students' perceptions of the teaching-learning process actually reflected what teachers were attempting to implement in the classroom.

References

Allameh, J. (1989, October). Just Who Are These International Students Anyway? Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southeast Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages. Raleigh, NC.

DuBois, C. A. (1959). Foreign Students and Higher Education in the United States. Washington, D. C.: American Council on Education.

Dunnett, S. C. (1977). A Study of the Effects of an English Language Training and Orientation Program on Foreign Student Adaptation at the University of New York at Buffalo. State University of New York at Buffalo, Special Studies No. 93.

Fasheh, M. (1984). Foreign Students in the United States: An Enriching Experience or a Wasteful One? Contemporary Educational Psychology, 9, 313-320.

Goodwin, C. D., and Nacht, M. (1983). Absence of Decision. New York: Institute of International Education.

Jackson, P. (1968). Life in Classrooms. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Karp, D. A. and Yoels, W. C. (1976). The College Classroom: Some Observations on the Meanings of Student Participation. In K. A. Feldman, and M. B. Paulsen, (Eds.), Teaching and Learning in the College Classroom. (pp. 451-463). Needham Heights, MA: Ginn Press.

Knowles, M. S. (1980). The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy. Englewood Cliffs: Cambridge.

Konyu-Fogel, G. (1993). The Academic Adjustment of International Students by Country of Origin at a Land-Grant University in the United States. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, West Virginia University.

LeCompte, M. and Preissle, J. (1993). Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research. (2nd. ed.) San Diego: Academic Press, Inc.

Lee, Motoko (1981). Needs of Foreign Students from Developing Nations at U.S. Colleges and Universities. National Association for Foreign Student Affairs.

Moore, F. G. (1965). The Collegiate Environment: The Experience and Reactions of Foreign Students. Bureau of Social Science Meeting, October, 13-17.

Spaulding, S. and Flack, M. J. (1976). The World's Students in the United States: A Review and Evaluation of Research on Foreign Students. New York: Prager Publishers.

Wan, T., Chapman, D. W. and Biggs, D. A. (1992). Academic Stress of International Students Attending U.S. Universities. Research in Higher Education, Vol. 33(5), 607-623.

Zikopoulos, M. (Ed.) (1991). Open Doors 1990/91: Report on International Education Exchange. New York: Institute of International Education.